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Weekly Press Conference: Ramadan: A Month of Victories - August 13, 2013

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Khalid Saleh
Head of Media Office
Weekly Press Conference
Istanbul, Turkey
August 13, 2013



TRANSCRIPT:

SALEH: (Speaking in English) I am going go ahead and just cover some of the points that we have in the press conference and the press briefing, and after that we will open it for Q & A.

Since the regime was able to capture the city of Qusair, in Homs, it had to rely on the foreign militias specifically the militias of Hezbollah and militias from Iran. What they have attempted to do is to really enlarge the victories that they have accomplished although these victories were fairly small; the city of Qusair had about 1500 fighters from the FSA who were fighting against about 20000 soldiers from the regime and from the Hezbollah's militias. What the FSA and the Supreme Military Council were able to achieve during the month of Ramadan proved that the regime was not able to hold on to the areas that it captured. Mr Al Jarba, at the beginning of the month of Ramadan, offered the regime a truce, and the goal from that truce was to relieve the Syrian civilians who are under the- who are suffering from the attacks of the regime. Unfortunately, the Assad regime took that offer of truce, the ceasefire, took it as a sign of weakness from the Syrian Coalition; from the SMC, and from the Revolutionary Forces. However, the events that took place during the month of Ramadan prove that the regime is completely- is incorrect in its calculations.

The FSA, the Free Syrian Army, was able to achieve over 63 strategic victories in Syria; was able to liberate over 35 checkpoints that the regime had controlled, and when I used the term "checkpoints" the regime usually has anywhere between 300 to about 1200 to 1500 soldiers in each one of those checkpoints, in addition to tanks and BMP fighting vehicles. The FSA was able to control several warehouses of weapons for the Assad's regime. The FSA was able to liberate the city of Khan Al Assal which allowed us; which allowed the FSA to cut the strategic supply lines for the Assad's regime in western of Aleppo. The FSA was able to capture the airport of Minnigh. The FSA also started liberating- the process of liberating the coastal areas in Syria emphasizing the unity of the Syrian land. The FSA was able to capture one of the largest warehouses of weapons in Homs, which is in what is called "Wadi Al Dahab". Also, the FSA started the liberation fight to liberate the city of Deir Ez Zor. The province of Deir Ez Zor is fully liberated except for the city, and now the FSA in the last four days announced the final process of liberating the city.

Mr Al Jarba visited, Dera'a during Eid. He performed Eid prayers over there. At the same time, we do not know exactly where Bashaar Assad performed the Eid prayers. It is believed that the recording of him performing the Eid prayer- that- what the Syrian TV stations put out as Assad performing Eid prayers were pre-recorded and were not actually live. Of course, we also recall that the FSA was able to target the Assad caravan that was taking him to the Eid prayers. This visit of Mr Al Jarba to Dera'a to perform Eid prayers follows his visit that took place after he was elected where he visited Bab Al Hawa. Also in the last couple of days General Salem Idris visited the coastal areas in Syria. These points emphasize the direction that the Syrian Coalition, and the SMC the supreme military council, is going to

be taking over the next few months which focus on tremendously on the inside of Syria. Our work as a Syrian Coalition is focused on working with people inside of Syria, and all of the diplomatic visits taking place are to take the message of the Revolution to the friends of Syria, and this is exactly what Mr Al Jarba did when he visited Saudi Arabia; when he visited Qatar, when he visited France, when he went and spoke in front of the Security Council.

In terms of a political solution, our position has always been clear. It has not changed. We have a framework that the Syrian Coalition has established on the 15th of February. We are very committed to that framework. We will sit on the negotiating table. We will negotiate. However, we will only negotiate the transfer of power from the Assad regime to the Syria people. We also emphasize that this negotiation process will take place after the shift of balance of powers on the ground. And this is what Mr Al Jarba had emphasized in all of his trips to the different countries, I have just mentioned. There is a lot of talk about the Syrian National Army, which Mr Al Jarba spoke about. This is something that has been in the works for many months prior even to the establishment of the Syrian Coalition. We believe that the circumstances are up to date, and we are able to actually put the Syrian National Army together. There are no names suggested for leading that Syrian National Army, and when the time is ripe, we will choose the right person according to military standards.

In terms of the situation that is taking place in the northern- in the north eastern parts of Syria, the Syrian Coalition put forward an initiative. The goal from that initiative- it contained 9 different points. I will go quickly through them. First is stopping the migration of civilians from any place and revealing any brigade that is responsible for that. Supporting the efforts of the supreme military council, the chief of command, to organize the free Syrian Army. Rejection; a complete rejection of all kidnapped- kidnap operations that might take place in liberated- liberated areas. Asking and calling upon all brigades within the Free Syrian Army not to establish any political initiative that goes against the national identity of Syria. Allowing relief material to get to all Syrian citizens regardless to any affiliation they might have. Protection of public and private property. The formation of a committee of the wise in the area from the different ethnic and religious groups to keep the peace in those area. Asking the different FSA brigades to respect the diversity in some of the areas in the northern eastern parts of Syria. And trying to establish a high commission in the northern eastern part of Syria to ensure- to keep the peace and safety for all Syria citizens in those areas.

I am glad to announce that the Free Syrian Army and the PYD have reached an agreement in the last few days to stop the fighting that took place. This will allow relief material to flow into citizens who live in those areas; to remove any checkpoints for the PYD to allow the FSA to move freely in the north eastern part of Syria.

In terms of frozen assets, we know that the Assad regime started a process to unfreeze some of the assets just last week. It is obvious to us unfortunately that the regime enjoys- still enjoys some diplomatic and legal status with some of the international- some of the countries within the international community. We are asking the countries within the Friends of Syria group to reconsider their position. We have made it pretty clear to Mr Ban Ki Moon that the allowing the Assad's regime to put its hands on the assets of the Syrian people is not acceptable to us. It is also interesting to us that the regime continues to enjoy the support, the financial support from the government in Tehran. We know the Iranian government has just committed \$3.6 billion to support the Assad regime. At the same time, the economic situation in Iran is very poor. The money that the Iranian government has committed to support the Assad regime will go directly into buying weapons that will be used to kill Syrian- Syria citizens.

We expect the head of the investigative committee Mr Sellstrom to arrive in Damascus in the next week or so to start the process of investigating the use of chemical weapons after a protocol was signed between the UN and the Assad regime. We have sent a letter to Mr Ban Ki Moon making it very clear that we do not consider the investigation is complete until all 13 sites where the Assad regime had used chemical weapons are investigated.

The next meeting for the Syrian Coalition will take place starting on Thursday the 15th of August- sorry this is the meeting for the political committee of the Syrian Coalition. It will start on Thursday the 15th of August continues until Saturday the 17th of August. It will be discussing many of the political files in front of it. There is plenty of- there are plenty of names are getting circulated about the next head of the

Syrian interim government. If you would allow me not to comment on that. We are in the process of reviewing different candidates and those candidates will- their names will be put in front of the General Assembly of the Syrian Coalition.

I want to talk a little bit also about Egypt. The Syrian Coalition have asked Egyptian authorities to release the Syrian citizens who were arrested over the last couple of weeks. The Syrian-The Egyptian authorities have used the excuse that those guys do not have permit to stay in Egypt. There has been some news circulated that the Egyptian government is considering sending some of these Syrian citizens back into the Assad regime. We believe that that will put them at risk, and we ask the Egyptian government to remember the hardship that the Syrian people are going through.

A couple of the other things that we want to cover. The situation in the city of Hara, in Dera'a. this is a city that the Syrian Coalition have sent a request to the United Nations, to Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch asking them to intervene as quickly as possible to save the civilians in that city. The city has been cut off completely for the last few weeks. The reports that we received indicate that there are over 47 martyrs who have fallen in that city as well as many other dead civilians who the FSA and civilians in that city are not able to recover their bodies.

We are going to be releasing a report. This report is going to come out in Arabic first, and then we will release the English translation. It talks about the 63 strategic victories that the FSA was able to accomplish during the month of Ramadan. I just want to cover specifically a couple of the areas. Latakia where the FSA continues to advance- There are different FSA brigades that are moving in that province. The regime have gathered thousands of its supporters trying to push the FSA back. However, they were not able to recapture any of the cities that the FSA was able to liberate. In Homs which the regime has put tremendous amount of pressure to recapture, the FSA fighters were able to blow up one of the largest warehouses of weapons in Wadi Al Dahab in the Dahab Valley in Homs.

The liberation process of Deir Ez Zor like I mentioned just started. The guys in Deir Ez Zor have been planning this operation for the last couple of months. There are many brigades who participate- are participating in this process. They were able to recapture- liberate many of the neighborhoods; Hai Al Muazafin, Al Ummal, Al Jubaila. However, the regime started using its MiG air force- its airplanes to bomb the city using- I think- in the last 24 hours they were able to conduct over twenty air raids on the FSA. The situation is pretty- is very dire over there.

On a personal note from the Media Office, one of our colleagues who was covering the liberation process in Deir Ez Zor was directly injured yesterday, and we ask for his safety- we pray for his safety. He is currently being treated. He is in a critical condition. We have also another colleague who was in a visit to the city of Aleppo. We are not going to release his name, but he had disappeared completely. We are not able to get in touch with him. His family is not able to get in touch with him.

With that I am going to turn to the Q & A. Karen.

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) I want to ask about the two Turkish pilots kidnapped in Beirut... (inaudible) did the Turkish government get in touch with the Syrian National Coalition or any other Syrian Opposition on the release of Lebanese captives.

SALEH: (Speaking in English) well there are no specific demands from the Turkish government in that regard.

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) The second question is: Could you give us some information about Saleh Muslim's visit to Iran?

SALEH: (Speaking in English) I did comment about that actually and I skipped the translation when I did the translation. One of the things when Saleh Muslim went to Iran he specifically said that there are common factors between the PYD and Tehran, and the fact that they both fight the salafis groups in Syria. It shows really bad intentions from Saleh Muslim who is part of NCC National Coordination Committee. We really believe he is damaging the relationship between the PYD and the Revolutionary groups on the ground.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) What is your response to those who accuse you of- and you talked about the victories in the Syrian Coast- who accuse you of neglecting the Syrian Coast and not providing enough support for it because there are those who do not approve of the recent operations of FSA in the Syrian Coast. The visit of Chief of Staff Gen. Salem Idris was described as part of public relation campaign, that it was short, and that no military support was provided after the visit.

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) There are a lot of rumors surrounding the issue of the Coalition's and the General Staff's support to the fighters in the Syrian Coast. Operations in the Syrian Coast started to emphasize the importance of the unity of Syrian territories; that we are keen to liberate all parts of Syria from the tyranny of Bashaar Assad. The fact of the matter is the support the General Staff is receiving is so limited. Gen. Idris made sure to show its support to the fighters in the Syrian Coast by visiting the area, which was done in cooperation with active leaderships on the ground there. We are working around the clock to get more support to the Syrian Coast. Yesterday, the Syrian National Council, one of the blocs of the Coalition, earmarked a sum of money to support fighters in the Syrian Coast as well as in Deir Ez Zor.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) Did the fighters at the front there receive arms?

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) I have no comment on that. I refer you to the General Staff.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) One more.

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) GO Ahead.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) I want to ask about the National Army. The Syrian Coalition has the General Staff as its military wing. What has changed now that you want to form a National Army? Also we have heard that the number of members of that army is estimated to be between 6000 to 7000 fighters whereas the number of FSA fighters is estimated to be 100.000 fighters. And will the role of that army be to expel foreigners as Mr Al Jarba stated?

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) I was one of those who first worked to establish the National Army. It was July last year. The National Army will be affiliated to the General Staff. Gen. Idris welcomed this idea. The General Staff comprises almost around 80% to 85% of the active fighting battalions on the ground. However, each of those battalions has its own leaders. There is cooperation but still we need more cooperation. And we feel the time is ripe now to combine all active battalions on the ground, which believe in future Syria, into the National Army. The idea is that we want the number of members of the National Army to reach 100.000 fighters, and we want to institutionalize the Free Syrian Army. But we need to be realistic; if we want to establish such an army, we need enormous support. We are talking about billions of dollars. This is one of the messages President Al jarba and Secretary General Bader Jamous conveyed during their recent diplomatic visits.

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) Just a quick question to clarify your current position- by your I mean the Syrian Coalition- regarding negotiating with Assad's government. Did you say that you will be willing to negotiate with him as a representative or does you pre-condition of him stepping down still stand?

SALEH: (Speaking in English) We have never put a condition on him stepping down. What we said, we will sit on the negotiating table. However, what we said is that any negotiating process must achieve the aspiration of the Syria people in establishing a democratic free Syria. We have also said we did not put any preconditions. However, what we said, that these negotiations will end up with the start- when they end up a transitional period will start, and that Assad and those who have killed over 100.000 Syrians will not be part of any transitional period. Those are beyond serial killers, and they must be held in court.

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) So you would sit down. You will be open to the idea of sitting down with Assad or any of his representatives provided that after that negotiation phase he agrees to step down.

SALEH: (Speaking in English) No, what we have said, we have put a framework to the negotiation

process, and that this is something that will be put forward the whole issue of Geneva 2, and I think the General Assembly of the Syrian Coalition have discussed that at least three times. We have always come out with the process. We are all- we believe in a political solution. We want to find a solution that will stop the bloodshed in Syria. However, what we see- while we are serious about the negotiation process- we see that the Assad regime is not serious about it. It is not serious in the fact that he continues to bomb civilians day in day out. So we said we will sit on the negotiating table. The condition is very clear. We are not going to negotiate with those who have killed Syrians. That is very clear. And any transitional period must start with the departure of Assad and the pillars of his regime and really holding them in court; putting them on trial.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) You talked about the Geneva conference. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov said there are talks with the Americans on the list of countries that will attend the conference. Is this the only detail that is remaining? It is as if everything were agreed on except that.

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) It is apparent that the US and Russia have not reached an agreement. If you follow closely the statement by officials from both countries you would notice the gap. It is important for us in the Opposition to save civilian lives and put an end to Assad's massacres against the Syrian people on a daily basis. However, the regime continues to maintain an intransigent position. It claims to support a political solution, but at the same time, it uses its air force as well as ballistic missiles against innocent civilians. Russia and Iran also remain more intransigent supporting the regime despite the fact that they know 100.000 Syrians were killed by the regime. We want those countries which support Assad to realize they are on the wrong side of history. They must stop their unlimited support immediately. We all know of Russian shipments of weapon that are delivered regularly to Assad's regime. We all know Iran provided nearly \$3.6 billion to the Assad regime.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) It seems that Gatilov's statements are aimed at buying Assad more time.

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) Well, we have made it clear during all our visits that we are ready to negotiate the departure of the regime. We are waiting those countries to reach an agreement, but there is no sign of an agreement until now.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) Agreement on the way of organizing the conference?

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) No, agreement on the main principles. That if there be a transitional government, Assad must have no role in it as well as those who have the Syrian blood on their hands. There must also be a specific time frame for the negotiation process. We do not want to get into a negotiation process where Assad has unlimited time to manipulate to kill the Syrians. There also must be an agreement on international guarantees that this process will succeed. The biggest question is: should an agreement be reached, can those countries force Assad to- they must show some goodwill, and that is something they have not shown.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) This means that both the US and Russia are not serious about it.

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) They are still discussing things.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) It could take years.

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) No, I think the recent advances of the Free Syrian Army during the month of Ramadan, especially in rural Latakia and Deir Ez Zor constitute a painful blow to the regime. The regime had to withdraw its forces from Hama and Homs to consolidate its forces in rural Latakia. Is the air conditioner on? There is a problem with it. I will take- sorry- yes.

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) apologies if there is some sort of lap- overlap. So the date for Geneva is slipping because the Opposition seems to be split. What are you doing to sort of come together and do your bit to come to the negotiating table. What are your expectations in terms of timing?

SALEH: (Speaking in English) Sure, well no, I do not think the date is slipping because of any fault of any of the Opposition. The date is slipping due to several reasons. I think the United States and Russia

are not able to reach full agreement. We know that because we sit and talk to them regularly. I think there is a gap there between the two countries. We have said we are going to sit on the negotiating table. That is something we made very clear.

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) But who is going to sit down? Like...

SALEH: (Speaking in English) The Syrian Coalition. This is something that the Syrian Coalition have made very clear. After the expansion of the Syrian Coalition, it is the umbrella group for all the Syrian Opposition. We include- it is impossible for us to include all Syria opposition- there are thousands upon thousands. But all significant Syrian opposition is included within the Syrian Coalition. But that is not the issue the whole debate is taking place.

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) So who is going to sit down there? Once America and Russia are..

SALEH: (Speaking in English) Sorry?

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) Once America- the US and Russia are ready, who is going to sit down?

SALEH: (Speaking in English) The Syrian Coalition is ready to sit down at the negotiating table. We will send a delegation. That is not an issue we worry about. That is something- I think deciding on the delegation is a simple matter. What is important for us is to establish the framework for the negotiation making sure that these negotiations do not allow Bashaar Assad to buy more time to kill more Syrians. What we said is we do not- we emphasize that any transitional period must start with the departure of Assad and the pillars of his regime, not only their departure but putting them actually on trial. You know, look at the UK or the US when you have a serial killer who have killed 50 or 60 people, you will definitely- you know, the authorities will chase him down. How about the person who have killed over 100.000 people? Those people who have destroyed Syria will not be part of the future in Syria. Let me take another. Anybody? Alaa.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) some say that Al Jarba's initiative is a tactical step adverse to the latest FSA achievements on the ground. It is harmful to the situation of battalions on the ground since not all of them are going to be combined under that umbrella. The question is: did the different battalions on the ground start opposing each other under the patronage of some regional powers?

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) What I have said is we have been planning for the National Army for more than a year. However, the problem we face is the financial support. We can talk about a lot of brilliant ideas, but without sufficient financial support the National Army is not going to be established. We believe the time is now ripe for establishing the National Army. Different battalions on the ground have welcomed the idea. I realize there are many rumors circulating media networks, but I think they are all unrealistic. Let me take. I will come back to you.

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) would you give us some more details about the unified army? Mr Al Jarba gave an interview to Al Jazeera saying that the rules of today has changed after the Hezbollah entered...

SALEH: (Speaking in English) Definitely. So what we saw is that the social support for the Assad regime has declined tremendously. His army- his capabilities have been degraded over the last few months. Now, he is having to rely on Hezbollah's militias fighters, who are fairly well trained. I mean those are fighters who fought against Israel back in 2006. We have talked about establishing a National Army- National Syrian Army. We have talked about this for at least a year. However, the conditions were not ripe for actual establishment, and the different FSA brigades were able to fight against Assad's fighters- Assad's brigades easily and defeat them. After the Hezbollah's militias entered, that changed the balance of power a little bit. There is a lot of coordination that is taking place between FSA brigades. That is the reason we see the operations are taking place in the countryside of Latakia, in Deir Ez Zor, in the different provinces which we are going to release the report to you. We believe the conditions are ripe now to the establishment of that National Syrian Army. However, what we must emphasize we want to reach a National Syrian Army of a 100.000 fighters. That requires a tremendous amount of financial support. This is something that the Syrian Coalition does not have- nor does the

Supreme Military Council. So this is something that is a project that we are taking to the different countries that we are visiting. Mr Al Jarba and Secretary General of the Syrian Coalition Dr. Bader Jamous have spoken about with different countries whenever they met delegations from those countries. Yes

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) Is Sudan among the countries supplying the rebels with weapons.

SALEH: (Speaking in English) Can you say- sorry.

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) I wanted to ask you about Sudan. There are reports today that they are among the countries supplying rebels...

SALEH: (Speaking in English) I doubt it. I mean it is a little far. The rebels are trying to get weapons from, like you know, neighboring countries, and it is fairly difficult, so Sudan is a little that bit far to get weapons from. Go ahead.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) you talked about an agreement between the Free Syrian Army and the PYD. Well, where did it happen? Rass Al Ein is one of the hottest spots in Syria right now. You have no presence there at all. It is Jabhat Al Nusra and the PYD. Where did it happen and can you give some more details?

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) I do not have a text of the agreement actually. There were two agreements actually; One between the PYD and Al Nusra, a truce during Eid, and another one between PYD and the fighting battalions like Suqour, Tawhid Brigade, and many others. Eventually, they have reached an agreement. PYD removed their checkpoints allowing FSA to move freely, deliver aid, and protect civilians whether Arabs or Kurds. The Coalition welcomed this agreement, and we have a liaison committee that is getting in touch with many active forces; especially in Hasakah. The role of this committee is also to settle difference between different groups there.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) Does this include Ras Al Ein?

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) It does. An agreement has been reached.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic): Does that mean that after Eid there will be more fighting?

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) As far as I know, I think fighting has stopped in the past couple of days, but let me check into that and come back to you.

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) Can we have a summary of this question and your reply.

SALEH: (Speaking in English) First, there was an agreement between the PYD and Jabhat Al Nusra. There was a ceasefire that took place during the Eid period. More significantly was the agreement between the PYD and the different FSA Brigades Suqour Al Sham, Al Tawhid Brigade, few other FSA brigades. That was a lot more detailed ceasefire. It called for the removal of different checkpoints that the PYD had established in different areas. It allowed for the FSA Brigades to move freely in the northern part; it called for-allowing more material to reach all Syrian citizens regarding to their ethnicity. This is something that the Syrian Coalition have welcomed. This is something that the Syrian Coalition have worked on. We have a committee from- that represents really some of the well-respected personalities from the province of Hasakah. They continue to work with active groups within Hasakah. And we have established a framework that we are calling different FSA brigades, we are calling upon the PYD, all different brigades that are carrying weapons in the northern part to respect. And this is something that we have seen in the last few days.

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) You just- sorry you just said that Saleh Muslim visit to Tehran was very (inaudible) that he was damaging the relations.

SALEH: (Speaking in English) Definitely.

QUESTION: (Speaking in English) So who is in this commission?

SALEH: (Speaking in English) The PYD, I mean, at the same time, he was signing the ceasefire he went to Tehran prior to that. What is important for us is that the fighting that took place stopped, and we have a truce. We have a ceasefire. The FSA brigades are able to move freely; were also able to get relief material to people in northern part- northern eastern part of Syria. I think that is what matters to us most. Anyone? Go Ahead.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) You talked about the representation of the Syrian people. You said Al Jarba visited Dera'a at the first day of Eid, and you do not know where Bashaar Assad prayed for Eid. The problem now is if you represent someone you are going to be providing services for them. There are areas the no one is providing services for. You say these are liberated areas, but most people see them as destroyed areas. How then do you think you represent the Syrian people?

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) We have here to differentiate between two things: The provision of services and political representation. The biggest problem facing the Syrian Coalition, and it is the same one the Syrian National Council has previously faced, is that if we want to be able to provide services, we have to have huge financial support in order to able to provide food, electricity, and water in liberated areas. Unfortunately, we do not have that kind of support. In order to give you a full picture of the situation let me tell you this; the monthly costs of services to the Syrian people amount to \$1.5 billion. The Coalition up till now has received less than 3% of that sum. That is why the Coalition cannot provide support to liberated areas. However, we have to keep in mind that the work that the Coalition is doing in cooperation with revolutionary forces in liberated areas as well as the establishment of Local Councils, which is considered a successful example in different areas. We are talking about the liberation of Deir Ez Zor. Deir Ez Zor had more than 100 local councils arranging public affairs despite their limited resources. The local council in Aleppo is also providing services. The local council in Homs, under the siege, is also providing services. The local council in Daraya, and I want to remind you of the press conference that the local council in Daraya had held in collaboration with our Media Office. Daraya is only 10 kilometers to the heart of Damascus. Despite that, the local council is striving to provide services and cooperate with FSA battalions that are repelling Assad's force on a daily basis. Let me take Amer and then I will come back to you.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) What is your comment on the latest statements by Barzani that he might intervene in Syria to protect the Kurds?

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) I think those statements were taken out of context. Mr Barzani talked about the need to protect all communities in Syria. We realize the sensitivity of the situation, and the agreement between the PYD and the FSA had settled the dispute in that area. The last question.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) As for the military achievements you talked about. You talked about 63 victories across Syria. Mr Al Jarba introduced an initiative aimed at establishing the Free National Army. Do you think this would sort of rob the FSA of their recent victories?

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) No, I think this is a continuation of the achievements of FSA. Mr Al Jarba is well informed about military matters. We aspire for more achievements. When we talk next month about FSA victories we want to talk about 200 strategic victories. We want to talk about liberating the Coast and Deir Ez Zor. In order to that, it is imperative that we institutionalize the Free Syrian Army and establish the Syrian National Army. It is a subject to be discussed with the General Staff and in the next meeting of the General Assembly of the Syrian Coalition. Thank you very much.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) Will the meeting be open for the media?

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) No, actually it will be a closed meeting.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) Will you hold press conferences?

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) Usually we issue a statement about the outcome of the Political Committee meeting. This is the fourth meeting of the Political Committee.

QUESTION: (Speaking in Arabic) Will it be held every month?

SALEH: (Speaking in Arabic) Nearly every other week there is a meeting of the Political Committee. Sometimes, it is held every week. Our aim here is to hold a weekly press conference to provide an update for you on different matters. Please contact public relations team to tell us your feedback on that. Thank you very much.

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